THE RICH GIRLS OF ROSEDALE

Our families had the background and money to give us everything — the best schools, best ponies, best trips abroad. Yet for Les, beautiful cool Les, this was simply not enough □ *By Margaret Drury Gane*

I have known her all my life — that is, twenty-two and a half years. Right away, that fact is going to effectively blow any true objectivity I have in telling you about her; so draw your own conclusions about her somewhere in the centre of the compliments and criticisms. If her virtues appear to bloom oversized, like blossoms enshrined under convex glass, or her faults loom and multiply as if on a microscope slide, remember that I cannot give the "cool wide view," being so close to her. We are, I suppose, best friends, and nothing, including what happened, can truly change that, though the circumstances of our lives are now pointing in opposite directions.

In a sense, the friendship was cemented before we knew anything about the world we lived in. Only one week apart in age, we lived two mansions apart in the densely treed and hushed opulence of Rosedale. Our mothers had us in the same hospital, where they occupied strictly private rooms with lax visiting rules that only applied to the wealthy. Here, we were carried to our mothers, our new backs supported by firm newspapers hidden beneath the receiving blankets, into the quiet draped rooms with a large easy chair, a television, a radio, an ashtray or two — like being born in the Ritz, really. Little plastic wrist straps declared us to be Jennifer Allison Rutgers, me — and Leslie Elizabeth Metcalfe, my friend. Only the last names carry real weight, if you know anything about Metcalfe Construction and Rutgers Corporate Holdings. You may see them occasionally in social columns, where the crisp clever thing to do is announce their appearance at some elegant function by printing: "H. Allan Metcalfe (he's president of the big construction concern) and his pretty wife, Ellen, were among those enjoying" . . . etcetera, etcetera. Sometimes our mothers get extra mention if they wear the latest Ricci, or have recently taken the singles cup at the club finals. But what is most important is what is printed *between* those parentheses. Both Les and I were born between them, auspiciously named, and heralded by quiet glasses of champagne and expensive cigars passed around. The fact that we wailed as loudly, demanded as parasitically, and soiled our diapers as wantonly as the "other" babies down in semiprivate or public wards made no difference. If the Queen of England had borne us our futures could not be more financially secure, more patterned. Rich baby girls need no silver spoon — they are hallmarked from the first drawn breath — the private school *Continued on page 60*

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Mother attended, and often grandmother, too; the ballet lessons, the tutor, the credit card as a gift, the right summer camp.

I cannot remember all of this, of course. It's just that it is so traditional, still the same with little children I see around me now, that I know my beginnings were the same. Like a sceptre passed from grande dame to young matron to daughter, we represent a sort of introverted moneyed Olympics where wealth and family form the standards and hang the invisible medals about our necks. Both Leslie and I had nannies, twenty-four-hour, sleep-in women of high intelligence and capabilities who slept only a whimper away from us, fed us, walked us, took us to our mothers for a perfumed kiss before they left the house for Junior League, or volunteer work, or a gala at night. Decorum might have been the name of our baby food, because it was spooned into us very early in life: I know *I* confused wee-wee with the 'Oui, oui' spoken by our French maid. In our babyhood isolation, Les and I had no way of knowing that we were both aired on luminous lawns in silvery-grey English wicker carriages behind the stone wall, seven feet high. Beneath the carriages slept our dogs, Les's burnished red setter folded in slim arrogance, and our Afghan's pale putty-gold hair strung out from the centre part, delicately licking her slender paws.

My first clear memory of Leslie is in the warm, animal-decorated station wagon from Miss Richmonds' nursery school. It picked us up one morning, the first two children on the route, and I sat solemnly assessing the pudgy snow-suited girl staring at a painted lion next to her seat. We said nothing to each other until a week later, when I suppose it dawned at last that we lived close together. By that time, we were in our distinctive Little Learner uniforms, pleated navy skirts, white blouses, and red blazers with an emblem of interlocked Ls on the lapels. On her fifth birthday, so close to mine, I was invited to her party, which featured a band of clowns, a hired magician, and Tommy Fielding tossing up his bunny-shaped cake all over the pink tablecloth. From that point on, we were allowed to play together and grew to share more than the endurance of private school and a different uniform. The thing about Les and I is that we never competed. I was better in mathematics, and she got As in every history we took. Otherwise, we were comparably good in sports and drew alternating Bs and C-pluses in other subjects. We were comfortable together, with the bonds of common background, amiable natures and a sometimes lonely, sisterless state within our homes drawing us closer.

"Do you think it's *natural* to hate your brother?" Les once asked me while we mixed our homework with two chocolate bars apiece in her elaborate French Provincial bedroom. "I mean, *really* hate?" (We were fourteen, I think — the age where every strong statement or question sounded underlined, like Queen Victoria's diary.) "Do you sometimes *despise* Tod?"

I thought for a moment about my brother. Tod was well past the teasing stage, and what I saw of him now was a spotty seventeen-year-old who regarded me as a fat kid with petty interests and dumb conversation. "Yes." I replied. "Yes, I *do* hate him. Sometimes I loathe him."

Leslie's endless jeaned legs untangled themselves and she sat cross-

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legged, looking puzzled. I noticed that she had one of those bars you can pull apart, layer by layer; she examined each carefully, then reconstructed it.

"*I* think we feel that way because we can't c a t c h up with them. They're always saying: 'Wait until you're sixteen, or seventeen' . . . or whatever *they* are. But when you get there, they're still ahead, saying the same dumb thing."

We were both in private school, our graduating year, when I began to sense some change in Leslie. Outwardly, she was as conventional as ever. If neither one of us was a raving beauty, we were learning very quickly that style sense could turn you into the "interesting" young woman whose elongated nose was diminished by m a k e u p . . . or blatantly flaunted to good effect, like Streisand. Whatever it was that was churning around in Leslie went unnoticed by me b e c a u s e she *s e e m e d* the same. But one day, when we were waiting for the bus on our way home from school, a group of kids from the nearby high school came laughing up to the stop in a mass of jeans, thick colored sweaters, denim jackets with crazy patches on them — the sort of clothes we could only wear at home, after hanging up the spruce-green skirt and jacket, putting away the knee socks and the starchy white blouse. We stood a little apart, as we always did, watching them covertly, clowning and joking among themselves.

"I get the feeling they have more fun than we do," Leslie said.

"They seem a little immature to me."

"Watch it — or you'll get to sound like Tod."

One of the boys in the group, lank red hair blowing in the cold spring wind, hunkered into his thick plaid jacket, looked our way, the wary appraising look that always suggested challenge and some kind of forbidden excitement. He looked first at me, which immediately triggered *my* Look of Indifference — then at Leslie, whom I watched in some discomfort staring gently back at him . . . then, my gawd, *smiling!* The boy's tea-colored eyes w i d e n e d slightly, the corners of his mouth turned up, and he blushed a little and turned away. I can't explain exactly why I disapproved. Flirting was as common and as casual a business as plunking coins into the soft-drink m a c h i n e: temporary pleasure with no food value. But it was the surprise of seeing my friend, who was generally shyer than I, less likely to contest her parents on a point of conflict, more conservative in many ways, suddenly taking the initiative with a boy who . . .

Who what? I thought to myself with some shame. Who "goes public," the business term we private school kids used to refer to the outsiders? It was all right to giggle over their possibilities as dates — what they would be like, taking us by bus or subway to a movie. Talking and wondering were safe. We often admitted to an attraction to that other life we did not share, much in the way rich girls in the twenties went slumming, I suppose. There was a tough, rough-edged charm to those boys that drew us as naturally as we intrigued them. After all, we only had to look back a couple of generations to find one of them in our own families: the Irish immigrant who came to Canada penniless, crude and full of moxy and

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made his million — or *ours,* to be fair! I forgot about the incident, of course, because it was trivial; but perhaps it returns to me now as a kind of wind sock that hinted mildly at the breeze blowing differently for my friend.

We had a lot to think about and plan for that spring. Graduation, with its accompanying parties, one of which was a biggie, requiring a gown made by Madame Francine who did all my mother's clothes. (I sound cynical, I know, rather than grateful — but the mathematical bent in me makes it so.) I see that spring as one hundred and fifty invitations, four boring fittings, two bad migraines apiece for our parents and a social calendar crammed with bought corsages and an army of proficient invaders turning the house into a Grecian urn. The ball reminds me in retrospect of a Miss Canada contest — fifteen or twenty of us paraded in varying billowing or trailing gowns, shiny gelled cheeks and shellacked smiles. The guests, who knew the rules of the game at this stage better than we did, outdid themselves in the wealthy art of pretending not to be terribly impressed. Leslie had done that for me — given me some insight into the odd workings of guests. We sat together on my curved staircase with a plateful of goodies while our dates went off to get coffee.

Les prodded the air with her shrimp fork toward a woman standing gracefully in our huge hall, cupping a champagne glass in one hand and gesturing limply with the other. "See her?" "Mrs. Bond-West?" "Yes." Les ate the shrimp and said: "I saw her downtown during my fitting. She was looking at Fine Furniture, you know? Looking bored to death, dragging that black sable coat along behind her like a tame animal—" "So what?" Les flipped back her straight black hair, and shrugged. "I don't know. It just seems funny to me, having to look like having money was a bore. I mean, why couldn't she smile, have fun?" I looked below and around me at the swarms of buzzing beautiful people, smiling, having fun. I really couldn't understand what was getting into Leslie.

"Aren't you enjoying the party?"

"Sure, but that's just my point, Jen. How long can we go on enjoying the party? My folks have theirs next Saturday night, and I'll bet already they're making mental additions to make sure they outdo *this* one. I just don't think I want to grow up to look like these people."

"But they're *our* people, Les. I think they feel they're doing us a favor, I really do."

"Like the trip to Switzerland this summer, the little break before college in the fall?"

"Well, yes. That, too."

Les looked as though she was trying to decide something. "It's too easy for me, Jen. It's like perpetual Christmas, and soon I'll be pretending for their sakes that I *do* like it. That's just a step away from convincing myself, isn't it?"

"Look, would you rather be poor, is that it? All hung up with guilt? My own mother said she went through that, too, when she was working Fridays at a drop-in downtown. She got over it because you'd go birdy if you didn't!"

Les pulled in the skirt of her gown, spread like satin lettuce leaves across the polished oak stairs, so that a guest could pass us. It was my party, but I honestly did not know who the guest was. The boys came back with our coffee, Rick Graham and Jamie Portland—kind, mannered boys with impeccable evening clothes and hopeful struggling expressions. Rick and I were friends, and it is an irony that we enjoyed each other's company, so there was no real appeal. But Jamie Portland (he's the son of L. Ronald Portland, Plastic Components) was hung up on Les. He stared down at her with the gulping hunger and tunneled vision that obliterated everyone else around. As Les's mother said, she could do much, much worse . . .

SWITZERLAND careened and dazzled us like flicked pages in a calendar, though already we were learning not to show our excitement lest it be mistaken for naïveté. For instance, when Leslie mentioned to the girl seated beside her on the jet that we would be seeing Paris before going on to Switzerland, there was a small, capsuled conversation that shows just how far one-up-woman-ship can go:

"Paris?" the girl drawled leisurely. She was petite, syringe-thin and understated in dress and conversation both. "Well, forget the Left Bank. It's a bloody bore. And the Seine," the girl went on, her eyes indistinct grey behind tinted glasses, "just forget all the romantic glob you may have heard. I went down it three years ago on a boat . . . filthy! Same goes for Venice, if you decide to do that . . . like floating on garbage."

"A kind of sedimental journey?" Les said coolly, and I was proud of her.

We *were* booked into the "right" places; I guess I hardly need to tell you that. But we saw hundreds of other people who looked a lot like us, and this is what started Les on those strange disappearances. We had separate rooms, because we could afford it, and mostly because we felt we should get away from each other at least at night. I woke up one day, went to Les's door and knocked. No answer. I thought she might be oversleeping and phoned from my room. No reply. When I asked the desk if I could be let in, he laughed. Of course, if it was necessary! "But the lady ate early and left a message for you that she'd see you for dinner tonight."

"You're sure?" Something akin to annoyance at my doubting his ability huffed ruddiness into his cheeks and stiffened his spine. Without a word he slapped a paper with the time, the message and the recipient before me on the counter.

I explored some low-swelling hills for the better part of the morning, had Princess Grace's daughter pointed out to me at lunch, and shopped through the afternoon for souvenirs for my parents. We had some mail, too, a long reflective letter from my mom telling me how wonderful it was to be twenty and getting the grand tour. Something for Les that looked like Jamie's handwriting. I pushed it under her door at five o'clock and had a hot shower. I laid out an apricot dress for dinner then flopped on the bed to wait for her. By six, I was starved, angry, pacing the broadloom worrying that she might have got lost, hurt herself. Surely she might have told me what the hell she was doing?

I dressed, muttering things to the mirror, slapping cigarettes and trivia into my bag, and went down to the dining room, where I ate at a small candle-lit table off in a corner — at my request — to sulk and nurse the wounded pride. Let her fall off a mountain, for all I cared. I had worked myself up to quite a rage when she came into the room with that nice touch of anticipation and pleasure people have before dinner.

"Hi," she said, plunking down all shiny and burnt-looking, wearing her pant suit. "Have a good day?"

"My calf muscles hurt a little . . ."

"Climbing?"

"Well, isn't that what we're supposed to be able to say we've done when we get home?" A wedge of

soufflé wobbled and melted on my tongue.

"You're mad," she declared. "I'm sorry about being so long. But what a *day* I've had!"

"Oh?"

"That's why I was so long. I just plain forgot the time!"

And me, I wanted to add; but it was difficult to remain angry in the face of enthusiastic incandescence. Les was glowing. "Tell me," I insisted, melting like the dessert.

"Jen, I put on my jeans. Say, did you know everybody wanted to buy them right off my — well, anyway, they're scarce here. I bought a knapsack in the village, and I hitched a few kilometres down to the next place!"

"You *what?*" Visions of old ugly newspaper headlines printed themselves inside my head . . .

"I got a ride with a nice couple who spoke French, and I wandered around the town looking for a hostel. That's where I had lunch — a chunk of cheese, goat's milk and heavy fresh bread — it was unbelievable!" She waved away the waiter, hovering slender and attentive, with an order for coffee. "And the kids I met — a girl from Australia, a Japanese boy with an English-French dictionary who was so neat he *ironed* his raincoat, would you believe it?"

"Go on —"

" — and something fantastic happened. Know who I met coming down the road as I left?" Somehow I knew it wasn't Princess Grace's daughter: "No, who?"

She propped her chin on her hands, staring happily through the aureola of gold surrounding the candle tip. "Do you remember the boy we saw at the bus stop one day on our way home from school, the one with the red hair?" I nodded, attempting to put a face to the memory. "Well, there he was, just tromping down the road with one of those big red backpacks that look like parachutes. We knew each other right away. That's why I'm not hungry — "

"You ate him?" My joke poked feebly through her joy and she rushed on.

"No, dummy, I ate *with* him. Stew out of a can . . ."

I don't know if I can accurately describe how I felt that night. It was a shared joke between us that both sets of parents had arranged to speak privately to us — mine to her, and the Metcalfes to me — urging us to look out for the welfare of the other. When we compared notes, we'd found they'd both said almost exactly the same words in the same way. "She's very young for this, really, and impressionable . . ." Neither of us was, but parents have a funny way of attributing great wisdom to you where it *isn't,* and tender youth where it *isn't.* At the time, we were too wrapped up in ourselves to realize that the concern was love.

Hearing about Les's day, I felt envy, surprise, and because I had been asked to watch out for her, a duenna sense of having somehow let her parents down. What I now believe bothered me most was her new spirit of independence. I was her friend, but some of the sharing was going. She had chosen to be alone, and from then on during the trip, she repeated the action; only, gradually, she dropped even the explanations afterward.

College widened the separation as surely as nursery school had sealed the friendship. I enlisted in courses directed at a bachelor of science degree, vaguely hopeful of a white-coated future in a hospital lab. Les pursued history, the social sciences, a kind of hodgepodge arts course that might lead in any one of several directions. We saw each other socially, of course, calmed down now to women who sometimes double-dated, arranged lunch together when we could, telephoned occasionally. There was almost a forced desperation in our meetings — none of the exchanged secrets and laughing camaraderie that had made us sisters in our teens. Something contained and oddly secretive made it difficult for me to ask her personal questions.

I knew she was seeing Jamie Portland regularly. Her family and his were interwound in business as well as socially, so that Les and Jamie were invited somewhat like Tweedledum and Tweedledee, automatically paired, with both sets of parents pressuring from the wings. It is not a new phenomenon. No one ever had to say: "He is *like* us, one of us. To marry him eventually would be as much a safeguard to the continuance of your life-style as money in the bank, or excellent investments thoughtfully made."

For this reason (I had the same treatment myself at home) I wasn't completely surprised when Les turned up for one of our rare lunches with her left hand weighed down by an egg-shaped diamond ring. We were eating in the college cafeteria, moving our trays along choosing yogurt, a salad and skim milk, and the blue lights from her finger jabbed the air. So much was changed, wasn't it? No gooey chocolate bars for us now since we'd read you could never be too rich nor too thin. Yogurt, and a diamond ring.

"So he asked you — "

"Again," Les interrupted. "It isn't the first time."

IN RETROSPECT, knowing what I know now, it was like watching Romeo and Juliet in reverse, mutually respectful families urging subtly. And Les, sitting there, neither agog with delight, nor miserable. Simply eating her careful lunch and telling me that it would be a big wedding (against her wishes) in Thomas Charles Beaton United Church, where we had all lisped our first incomprehensible prayers.

"Will you stay in school?"

"Oh sure, until I get my degree, for whatever that's worth, and Jamie's settled in the business. Mom wants us to live at home, but I've put an absolute no on that idea. By the way, you'll be maid of honor, won't you?"

I agreed, naturally. In a complete reversal of my mother's generation, I had quite willingly been bridesmaid twice already, only too grateful I wasn't the bride. I was finding the lab work too engrossing to worry much about marriage, clinging in my compromising nature to the idea that somehow I would meet a man who worked at the same profession, pleasing me, and was extraordinarily wealthy, satisfying my family.

Les ate slowly, telling me of the reception planned even now as a vast home affair. "We would like to wait until next year, but my mother is terrified I'll get pregnant or something, so it's next month." I had been in contact enough times with the amazing Mrs. Metcalfe to know that the General Motors in her would manage that quite nicely.

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"She wants to handle the works, so I can relax," Les explained wryly. "When I get home this afternoon, she'll have the coffee tables spread with samples of paper for the invitations and clippings from Vogue to select a gown from."

Congratulations, which weren't socially in order anyway, stuck in my throat. I rambled along like a Chatty doll, asking this and exclaiming over that — not mirroring *her* excitement, but rather having it for her, trying to compensate for a lax, uninterested attitude on her part. That tells you how far we had drifted apart, because at one time I would have explored that attitude, asking her *why, why* . . . Intimacy like that was no longer welcome, I could tell.

The wedding in all its social enormity loomed and enclosed me, too, though I honestly tried to avoid as much of the periphery flutterings as was politely possible. Fittings, which we had all had since we could toddle to our feet, were borne with the dead-eyed stoicism of practiced models. When I stared at my reflection in the mirror, I saw a kind of WASP, Canadianized Scarlett O'Hara, gowned in layer upon layer of Mrs. Metcalfe's beloved ruffles, with one of those ghastly gauzy hats that look as though they should be protecting a cake from flies.

Since it was May, Les's mother had determined on a "life-renewed" theme. Spring garlands twining the staircase, attendants in the colors of daffodils and tulips, tiny bursting buds filling every available vase. It was in this atmosphere that I tried to study for upcoming exams, turning my head into a two-compartment affair. One side studied bone marrow and blood while the other held Les's wedding and a growing concern for her pallor, thin body, unnatural lack of communication. I could not help but wonder why her family did not see it. They adored the girl; they always had. But social hysteria had gripped them like disease, so that they flitted like insects from decorating to catering to protocol, blinded somehow to my friend's wishes, appearance, attitude. And so Les was passed from hand to hand for preparation, an object no longer noticed in the larger importance of the game.

It has to be said here that not once did it occur to me that Les did not want the wedding. Jamie was likeable, earnest, even warm, and quite crazy about her. But he was, in a way, a good habit, predictable enough to be trusted, future assured. I really believe Les liked him very much, and who expects sexual razzle-dazzle where one's whole upbringing stressed "possibilities" in a mate? I believed that it was the suddenness of the wedding, the whole big circus scene that eventually numbed Leslie. Everybody else attributed it, I'm certain, to "nerves," taken as a rather healthy sign in a bride by the brood who now constantly fed on her parents' bank account while they bullied and fussed around her.

ONE WEEK before the wedding, I sat at my bedroom desk, digging into a biology text. Hank, our third Afghan, slept beside my bare feet; I was alone in the house. Tod had a business trip to Montreal, mother and father were attending a theatre party, and it was Hennie's night off. I loved it. The peace of many quiet rooms, an FM station playing Mozart — nothing better to study to — occasionally moving my toes over old Hank's silky back. The phone rang, one of seven in our house, and I was so engrossed in my work that I simply picked it up and answered mechanically, without taking my mind off the book.

"Hello, Jen Rutgers here." Hank opened one amber eye, and closed it again.

"Jennifer?" something wild and breathless rasped into my ear. "Is she there?"

"What? I'm sorry, who is this, please?"

The tones were unrecognizable, as if throttled and squeezed through a sieve. "She's gone! Leslie has left!"

"Mrs. Metcalfe, is that you?"

"Yes!" she shouted impatiently, as though I'd already been told. "Did you hear what I said? Leslie is not here! We got back from shopping and found a small note saying she would be going away. My God! Can you imagine?"

I felt a little alarmed myself, but there was enough for three people in Mrs. Metcalfe, so I adopted my cool lab tone: "Did Les say where she was going?"

"Only that — what was that, Allan? Wait a minute —" At once her voice became muffled and distant. She was talking rapidly to her husband with her hand clamped over the mouthpiece. Back blared the voice: "Nothing! Just a polite note."

"Could you read it to me?" Rustle, clink (Mr. Metcalfe's ice tinkling against a glass of calmer-downer as he handed it to her).

"It says: 'Dear Mom and Dad; I am terribly sorry to leave in this way, without saying something beforehand. I tried one night, but you were on your way out and I don't think you really heard. I am going away for a while. I don't know how long, or even exactly where I will go. I've spoken to poor Jamie, who doesn't deserve this, but I'd make him much more miserable later . . .'" Here, there was a kind of gurgling, gulping sound that I interpreted as either motherly despair, or more likely, annoyance that Les had not said that about her parents. Suddenly, I remembered Switzerland and my own anger at Les's ability to leave notes.

"'. . . Do not worry (Ha! her mother interjected), I will keep in touch with you, Love . . .'" A small sob lept the telephone wires between us and smacked my eardrums. "Oh, Jennifer, what are we going to *do?*"

"Well, for one thing, don't telephone the police, or anything silly like that, will you?" Mr. Metcalfe's fix-it syndrome could make things much too difficult for Les. You'd be surprised how hard it actually is for a rich person to just leave; immediately, every lever is thrown, airports scanned, depots, private detectives employed, cruisers pressured away from important business to creep the streets. "After all," I added with some authority, "Les *is* twenty-two. She scarcely qualifies as a missing person. And there's no foul play, obviously." Wouldn't you think, under normal standards, that the things I said were comforting, sensible, reassuring? As shocked as I was, I was of Les's generation, and I had known that something other than nerves had been driving her lately.

"Are you *sure* she didn't telephone you about this?" Suspicion had crept into her tone, undermining my compassion for Mrs. Metcalfe's position. I was about to answer when the phone clicked and there was *Mr.* Metcalfe's baritone. He'd got onto an extension and began a cross-examination. *Any* hints I might have overlooked? After all, I was her best friend, maid of honor. Pure Perry Mason. I got rid of them finally, all of us on the three phones sticking to our own concepts:

"She'll be fine," I said firmly, wondering a little sadly why Les hadn't confided in me.

"The dresses and the presents," moaned Mrs. Metcalfe, probably in genuine horror of confronting the Sherman tank who would have to be

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told her consulting was not required.

"Now, Emily," Mr. Metcalfe said soothingly into his phone, "settle down. I give her a month at the most, maybe just two weeks. Kids this age go through funny stages — ups and downs . . ." He sounded as though he were talking of the stock market. I hung up gently, asking them to let me know if they heard further news. Neither one heard me.

I was making myself a cup of tea when the doorbell rang. I clicked the burner switch to "2" and opened the hall door, old Hank hugging my heels and swishing his feathered tail in leisurely delight.

"Les! And—" I hesitated, turning to the tall red-haired man standing beside her. "And—"

"I'm Steve Groat."

Ingrained manners covered my shock, and relief, too. I asked them in, and in true Friar Laurence style, whisked them to my room with the tea tray, in case my parents should arrive early. Admittedly, it was like it used to be—well, almost. Les's eyes shone as she squatted on my rug, chomping on doughnuts, the only easy edible I could find in my haste and disorder. Her friend looked only slightly older than the time I had first seen him waiting for the bus, the time Les had smiled at him and made a disapproving square out of me. They talked and explained quietly, convincingly, taking me into their confidence at last.

Since the Switzerland trip, Les had seen him many times; he worked in Groat's Garage — everyone knew it because that's where we took the second and third cars we got for passing, or failing if *that* required comforting. Groat's didn't rip you off, the work was excellent — they'd *go* places, my own father had once ironically remarked. Like so many of his generation and bent, my dad seemed to judge everything in terms of mobility — going places, on the way up. The Steve Groat I met struck me forcibly as someone who knew when to stay still. They were in love, but Les had never been able to explain that to her parents. She didn't even have to tell me why.

"So I just decided one day — right in the middle of all those dresses flopping around my room — that I would be honest with myself, even if I wasn't being honest with everyone else. I don't know when we'll marry, or even *if* we'll marry. We've got enough to take us on a backpacking trip through the west, and from then on we'll just play it by ear. I didn't want to leave without telling you." She still looked a bit pale and worn out, I observed, but her eyes had lost two years of frost.

"Are you leaving tonight?" I asked, worried that they were too close to the people who might really take it into their heads to set a search in motion.

"Yes." They said it unanimously.

"How?"

"By bus . . ." Steve replied.

"Okay, then. I'll drive you to the depot." They had very little with them. Warm jackets, jeans, backpacks. I slid the car from the driveway, a conspirator, driving two people who were not married to a destination I would help keep secret. The lights touched the shadowy street, spattered with the silhouettes of new green leaves, arched across a triangle of orange tulips, picked out the familiar stone archways and grilled gates of our childhood as I sped as fast as safety would allow down our street. Steve Groat did not say much; I think he may have been a bit overwhelmed still by the surroundings Leslie had chosen to leave. My father had always said socialists were capitalists inside, meaning I suppose that what he had was what everyone making less secretly yearned for. Like Mr. Metcalfe, it had not occurred to him that there were people around who somehow managed to remain happy within the dignified framework of work they liked. And they were, to me, astonishingly free. To dress, labor, move around simply — never woven into the golden web of predestination that was The Club, The Resort, The School, The Only Way of Life. Only the very poor and the very wealthy are prisoners of money.

When we reached the depot the bus was waiting. I saw them on, keeping an eye out for anyone who looked like they might be representing the Metcalfe interests. If anyone *was*, then three of us laughing together must have thrown them off. They pulled away minutes later, bound first for Sault Ste. Marie, waving merrily from the window.

IT IS A Saturday morning, June tenth, and I am reading a letter from Les written with purposeful vagueness "somewhere on a B.C. mountain." My mother who is president of a church group that helps "underdeveloped countries," is giving a tea this afternoon, and even this early in the day, men have arrived to rake the pool of offending leaves, so that gardenias can be dropped later to float as though they *grew* there. By the stone wall where I was once aired in an expensive carriage, round tables had been set, with Perkins-pink tablecloths and crystal bowls of my own grandiflora roses. My mother is fussy, rattled, happy, referring to the minister who will be the special guest with careless intimacy, "Andy Walton's dropping in, too." Being on such good terms with him seems to bless the day with sunshine and assure a later place in another heaven. My mother is proud that I have a job in Langley's pharmaceutical lab for the summer, and will mention it to the women who come today.

What I see around me, and what I read in Les's letter clash and conflict, yet surely there must be a place for both. It is just that Les has made new rules, elastic and adapting, while my mother works within the strict code of her status. Les's silver spoon has dropped from her lips; my mother's will tap a crystal goblet gently for silence when the meeting opens.

I won't stay for the day, I think . . . for the iced strawberries and thin sandwiches and genuine concern for the poor of the Third World. I put the letter in my pocket to read again later in the park where I'll slowly walk old Hank during the tea. . . . *"Good luck, my good friend . . ."* It is time for me to stop and have a wide, clear look at choices. END